

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to express our concern over the rapidly evolving situation with COVID-19 and the impact it is having on Arizona's agricultural industry. We thank you for your leadership at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) working to support producers around the nation, including specialty crop producers, who have been struggling greatly during this pandemic.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides \$14 billion to replenish the Commodity Credit Corporation as well as \$9.5 billion to provide "support for agricultural producers impacted by coronavirus, including producers of specialty crops, producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools, and livestock producers, including dairy producers." As USDA moves forward in allocating these funds, we ask you reserve funding in order to provide relief to our specialty crop producers. Specifically, we would urge you to include the components mentioned below.

We encourage this plan to include guidance to create a purchase program for fresh fruits and vegetables as well as dairy products. The closures of our service industry have harshly impacted our fresh produce market. We are aware that USDA is working alongside schools and food banks across the country, however large volumes of product previously contracted to schools are being left unsold, and in the case of dairy, product is being dumped out. We encourage the Department to work with producers of specialty crops through a direct purchase program to procure specialty crop commodities that can be utilized either by school feeding programs or the national food bank system. I recently volunteered at a food bank in Phoenix and the demand is skyrocketing due to the massive layoffs and deep economic impact to so many individuals and families, so this direct purchase program would help feed so many Americans at this challenging time.

Additionally, we urge USDA to provide direct payments to specialty crop producers impacted by lost sales or other financial losses due to the COVID-19 emergency. Due to the potential for significant instability in our food supply, we recommend those that can identify continued loss of markets be afforded direct payments in accordance to their impact.

Lastly, the reality of the situation is such that many growers and shippers may struggle to meet contractual obligations under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA). We encourage USDA to grant flexibility to all legitimate PACA trust claims in light of the current situation.

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We respectfully ask that USDA works to ensure these requests are addressed as CARES Act programs to support agricultural producers are developed and implemented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Martha McSally". The script is fluid and cursive.

Martha McSally  
US Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyrsten Sinema". The script is fluid and cursive.

Kyrsten Sinema  
US Senator